Base Metal...

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Introduction

How might I be fully alive and resourceful and make the most of 2024? In this edition of Base Metal Paul explores the importance of taking care of self in order to be able to support others. How when I am busy and pressured do I manage my time, choices, priorities and commitments wisely? If I am not in a capable state, what message does this send for my client?

Paul and Ray **The Alchemy team**

Self-care

"When you want something done, ask a busy person." This adage is, I'm sure, true for many at both ends of that continuum of need and service. Being busy is generally seen as a good thing in our society – "work hard, play hard"; businesses talk about the importance of productivity, and 'busy' means more turnover, and that's got to be good, right? While unwell over the Christmas period, I had some time to reflect on some of these issues that are relevant for me right across my varied (and busy!) professional portfolio.

Q. *Am I 'busy' doing the right things? Right things for whom or what?*

Through a coaching lens, this strikes me as a useful area of exploration for coach and coachee alike. What does my 'busy' actually consist of? What meaningful output am I generating as a result and for whose benefit? Is my focus and my time being utilised to best effect? The follow up area to this is, of course 'how would I know?'[1]

I have seen organisations and individuals frequently where the work seems to primarily serve the internal 'hamster-wheel' of process, with the significant risk for all that people feel and look busy but without the actual, tangible results that might make a difference. It is perhaps a challenging thought as a coach to reflect on how often we might stray into this territory, as well as considering how to assist our clients in recognising that risk, and helping them (and ourselves) to find ways to avoid it.

Through a leadership lens, this gets even more complex as I, as a leader, model and communicate certain behaviours and a wider organisational culture. If I am perceived to be very busy to little effect, what chance have I of cultivating authority and bringing people with me? Similarly, if I end up working long hours, and continually communicate the message of having far too much to do, what (potentially unreasonable) expectations do I set of those that I lead? There is clearly a balance here with regard to visible responsibility, but organisational culture can be a powerful force that needs careful management to harness its positive potential, guarding against the risk of that expectation becoming toxic.

1 One of my own recent examples here was a reflection in a particular part of my work: however I might feel at the outset of a piece (even at times the "I don't want to be here" response), twenty minutes in and I am re-energised and enthusiastic. This indicates perhaps that there is something of significant value to me in this work.

All this has led me to reflect on two things. Firstly, if as a coach (and potentially as a leader too) I have any belief in the notion of unconditional positive regard, it is incumbent on me to sharpen my awareness of the state of both those with whom I am working, and just as importantly, myself. If my own state is not where it should be, how can I possibly show up to deliver to my best in what I am doing? And what if I see that in others too?

There is clearly a time element here, whether that takes the form of preparation or delivery, but there is also a major element of self-care. What do I need to do to enable myself to be effective in my work? What space/other activity/exercise/meditation/time (delete as appropriate!) would help me to show up better, and how might I create that?

Businesses, and indeed coaches frequently talk of stakeholders: who might they be in this area of your life and what effect might a wider consideration of the stakeholder map have on the choices you make, and their impact?

Book review

For busy-ness and self-care, an abundance of riches to investigate. Sense what you most need and choose accordingly. Other titles also available! "**Life Happens** - waking up to yourself and life in a mindful way", Cheryl A. Rezek, Leachcroft Ltd. 2010; "**Naturally Mindful** - reconnecting with the natural world, discovering your true self", Leaping Hare Press, 2016; "**Five Minutes to a Mindful You** - a guided journal for self-reflection", Aster/Octopus Publishing 2018; "**First Things First**", Stephen R. Covey and A. Roger Merrill with Rebecca R. Merrill, Simon & Schuster, 1994; "**Making time for me** - a practical guide to getting priorities right", Penelope Ody, Kyle Cathie Limited 1999; "**Give me time**", The mindgym, Time Warner Books 2006; "**Calm at Work**", Paul Wilson, Penguin Books 1998; "**Living Leadership**", George Binney, Gerhard Wilke, Colin Williams, Prentice Hall, 2009; "**Get Productive** - boosting your productivity and getting things done", Magdalena Bak-Maier, Capstone 2012; "**How to be a Productivity Ninja**", Graham Allcott, Icon Books Ltd. 2016: "**Resilience** - a practical guide for coaches", Carole Pemberton, Open University Press 2015; "**Mindful coaching** - how mindfulness can transform your coaching practice", Liz Hall, Kogan Page Limited 2013; "**The Heart of Coaching Supervision** - **working with reflection and self-care**", Eve Turner, Stephen Palmer, Routledge 2019.

Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"Nothing contributes so much to tranquilise the mind as a steady purpose." Mary Shelley.

"Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under the trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of water or watching the clouds float across the blue sky, is by no means a waste of time". John Lubbock.

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paul@alchemyofcoaching.com **ray@alchemyofcoaching.com**

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